



MPR INTERVIEW: FR. BOYLE & MAYOR REED

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NPR INTERVIEWS FATHER BOYLE & SAN JOSE MAYOR REED

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U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder wants to prevent gang violence. Earlier this week, he addressed the California Cities Gang Prevention Network conference. San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed and Father Greg Boyle, founder of Homeboy Industries, one of the nation's largest gang intervention programs, share their impressions.

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ALLISON KEYES, host:

This is TELL ME MORE, from NPR News. I'm Allison Keyes. Michel Martin is away.

Coming up, we'll talk more about Supreme Court nominee Elena Kagan. But first, we talk about the urgent need to combat gang violence. Earlier this week, Attorney General Eric Holder addressed the California Cities Gang Prevention Network conference. That's a group of 13 cities in California committed to sharing their best practices on gang violence prevention. Joining me now is the mayor of San Jose, California, Chuck Reed. He joins me from his office in San Jose. Also on hand in San Jose, attending a conference, is Father Greg Boyle. He's the founder of Homeboy Industries, one of the nation's largest gang intervention programs.

Welcome to you, gentlemen, both.

Father GREG BOYLE (Founder, Homeboy Industries): Good to be with you.

Mayor CHUCK REED (San Jose, California): It's great to be here.

KEYES: Mayor Reed, I'd like to start with you. In a speech, Attorney General Holder singled out your city for a lot of praise. Talk to us a little bit about your task force.

Mayor REED: The San Jose model, we call it the Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force, is something that we started nearly 20 years ago in San Jose. It's had great success in San Jose, and it's become the model for the California program. And now it's being recognized nationally with the National League of Cities, and now the Justice Department acknowledging and recognizing the fact that we have this collaborative model that really can have an impact on gang violence and keeping our kids out of gangs and getting them out of gangs once they're there - with suppression, of course, being the other part. So it's three parts: suppression, prevention and intervention. They've all got to work together in a collaborative model with lots and lots of players at the table.

KEYES: When you say collaborative, we're talking your office, the sheriff, DA's - everyone?

Mayor REED: Well beyond that. It's - law enforcement is one piece of it. Suppression is, of course, vital. But we have about 75 community-based organizations that are part of our technical team, plus we have schools and churches. Faith-based organizations are a key part of it. So it's really a very broad collaboration. It's not just law enforcement.

KEYES: What kind of success has your approach seen?

Mayor REED: Well, we can track our data over a couple of decades now. And the best example I can give is what's happened since I came into office. In 2004, the gang violence in San Jose started going up. I took office in 2007. We decided to put some more resources into it so we could get more community-based organizations engaged. We turned the corner on gang violence in September of '07, and it's been coming down ever since then because we invested a little bit more in the model. We don't spend a lot of money on it. It's about 1 percent of what we spend on the police department. But it's really important to have this extra help from our community-based organizations and our Park and Recreations staff in the city working with the police department.

But we can track it. Gang-related homicides are down. But this is the kind of thing you have to stay on top of. You cannot turn your back on it, because it's a constant problem. Kids are constantly growing up, and they're constantly getting into gangs. You can never stop this kind of a program. You have to stay with it forever.

KEYES: Father Greg, Attorney General Eric Holder said in his speech, in the president's budget for fiscal year 2011, 12 million in new funding has been requested specifically for gang and youth-prevention efforts. Is that enough money?

GANG SUMMIT BLOG ENTRIES

Father BOYLE: Well, I mean, I'm - anytime that the attorney general says that gang violence is a priority, that's a good thing. And you're hopeful when that happens. And, now, 12 million is a pretty tiny drop in a big, fat bucket. My annual budget is \$10 million a year, and we're the largest gang intervention program in the country. But if that's what my budget is, and this is what the attorney general is proposing, new money, new funding, I think you can see that it's not very much.

You also heard other numbers, you know, 50 million for children exposed to violence, and perhaps five million allocated for community-based, faith-based organizations, which is what we would be. So - but if you - if that's for the entire country, wow. It's not much. And all of us, you know, especially in the nonprofit, you know, faith-based community programs, we're all struggling to keep our doors open, so - in difficult times.

KEYES: I...

Father BOYLE: And I know in L.A., you know, since 1992, gang-related homicides have been cut in half, and then cut in half again. And that's only had everything to do with the fact that there are so many, you know, community-based programs that address lots and lots of things, like our place, but lots of other programs that, you know, address kids who are unable to imagine a future for themselves.

KEYES: It seems, father, that I...

Father BOYLE: Since this is about a lethal absence of hope, that's where you want to, you know, allocate your resources.

KEYES: Father, I read a stat somewhere the other day that said 60 percent of youth under 17 in our country have been exposed to crime abuse or violence. Is that correct?

Father BOYLE: Yeah. That's part of his report and - which led him to allocate or commit - maybe it's old money, the 50 million, for children exposed to violence. And that's certainly true. But the truth is - you know, and I applaud the mayor in San Jose. It's long been considered a mode approach as a city. But in every city, you know, nobody's every met a hopeful kid who joined a gang. And - because hopeful kids don't.

And so, if that's our diagnosis, you want to, you know, allocate resources and energy and focus in a different way. The attorney general, in his remarks, you know, was talking about we need to find ways to help young people resist the allure of gangs. But that's kind of a common diagnostic mistake, you know, that there is allure. Kids aren't seeking anything when they join the gang. They're always fleeing something.

KEYES: Father, I need to ...

Father BOYLE: And sort of these insider views...

KEYES: Father...

Father BOYLE: ...that's always...

KEYES: Father, forgive me. I need to just jump in for a second, here. If you're just joining us, this is TELL ME MORE from NPR News. I'm Allison Keyes. I'm speaking with Father Greg Boyle, who works with former gang members. We're also joined by San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed.

Sorry, father. Continue your thought.

Father BOYLE: Well, it just - there's kind of an outsider view that kind of looks at this and kind of tries to figure out - we wonder what this is about. And mistakenly, sometimes people think it's the Middle East or Northern Ireland, where warring parties are together and should be kind of, you know, peace should be brokered. That's one outsider view. And the other one is that, somehow, kids are lured or drawn or attracted to gangs, which is not my experience. I've been doing this for a quarter of a century. So, you know, these are the things that somehow drive our policy, and they're not quite right. And, in the same way, you know, we've always thought this is a crime issue, and it's more a community health issue. And were we to shift our focus and start to address the, you know, the climate in which kids exposed to violence and are surely hopeless...

KEYES: Father, I need to jump in and bring in Mayor Reed for a moment. Mayor, what's - what kind of things are working in San Jose?

Mayor REED: What's working is having our community-based organizations on the streets. And one area we can always point to, I think, that people can understand best is we have gang violence. Sometimes it's horrific. And one of the things that we're able to do is to send resources and people into the area that's effected and prevent the retaliation, because a lot of it is somebody does something to me. I do something to them - back and forth. If we can break that cycle, that helps bring down the violence. So that's one thing we can do with community-based



- organizations, our churches and our schools, is get engaged very quickly when we have an incident. So that's an important point -part of bringing down the violence.
- But having the community-based organizations, our schools and our churches -particularly our churches are very effective at reaching kids, to give them hope and alternatives. And that's a key thing they changing what they're think they're going to do with their lives. And we can only do that with the community-based organizations who are on the streets, dealing with the kids, building those relationships.
- **KEYES**: Father Greg, has the methodology of making this work in the community changed in the years that you've doing this?

Father BOYLE: Yeah. I mean, I think solely - obviously, everybody says now suppression, prevention, intervention.

KEYES: Wait. Let me stop you there. And break that down for us a little bit. What does that mean?

- **Father BOYLE**: Well, in my definition, prevention means that, roughly under 14, how do you keep kids from joining gangs? You know, loving, caring adults who pay attention, after-school programs, mentoring, sports. And then intervention is helping, assisting those who have regrettably found their way into a gang. So you need some kind of exit ramp off this crazy freeway. If you don't offer one, then what's the point of kind of hollering out them and shaking our fist at them? There has to be a way to exit and to redirect your life. And that's what Homeboy Industries does. And then enforcement, or suppression. And that's a huge shift in everybody every chief of police in the country says we can't arrest our way out of this problem.
- But even more, we need to have all hands on deck. This is really a community health issue, and it would be hard to imagine any member of the community who couldn't beneficially impact this issue. And so everybody ought to. The more we keep this rarified or specialized or even professionalized, then we eliminate, and people start to disqualify themselves as being stakeholders. And everybody ought to be, including employers. If no if in prisons, we prepare inmates for nothing and nothing awaits them when they return, then, you know, we lose our right to be surprised at how high our recidivism rate is in the state of California.
- **KEYES**: Father, let me jump in and bring in Mayor Reed for a moment. I know that violence in your city has been going down. Where are you hoping to see San Jose in the next three years? And how much is this money going to help that?
- Mayor REED: There's not a lot of money at the federal level, honestly. We spend, in our own program, about four to \$5 million per year. You know, Father Boyle mentioned that his program runs about \$10 million a year. So we're not looking to the federal government to give us money to make the programs work. We are interested in the collaboration across the country, because other cities may figure out ways to do things better than we do. And being able to work together helps spread those best practices, and we can learn from that.
- So we're not looking to the federal government for a pot of money. We would certainly be able to use the money. We will apply for the money. We'll be looking for the money. But ultimately, we're responsible for taking care of our own city. If the federal government can use this money to induce other cities to get into this gang prevention/ intervention model, that would be good. So I think that the, sort of the bait that the attorney general has put out there should be helpful with other cities to get their attention and get them into the program, but you cannot do this on federal money. You cannot rely on something that's a one-time funding source. You have to be committed to staying in this issue for the long haul, and I mean a very long haul.
- **KEYES**: Mayor Chuck Reed is the mayor of San Jose, California. He was kind enough to join us by phone from his office. Father Greg Boyle is the founder of Homeboy Industries and the author of "Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion." And he also joined us on the phone from San Jose. Sorry we couldn't talk about this longer. There's a lot to say. Thank you both for speaking with us.

Father BOYLE: Thank you, now.

Mayor REED: You're welcome.

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